

Moving towards diversity and inclusion in science: Why it is essential for Physics in Africa

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The challenge of diversity and inclusion in science is not solely about demographics. And although improving the numbers is a necessary start, it is not enough to truly address the challenge. Many institutions in South Africa, for example, are making concerted efforts to recruit students and staff from historically marginalized groups, but this approach will only succeed if academics, administrators, and the scientific community at large also consider the environment that the students and new staff are being recruited into, and how to make those spaces truly inclusive arenas where a diverse group of scholars can thrive.

For an environment to be inclusive, students and staff also need spaces to openly and honestly vocalize their feelings and anxieties related to broader social issues. At the Nelson Mandela University, for example, such spaces are created under the theme of 'Courageous Conversations'.

Creating an inclusive scientific community, particularly within the context of South African academic science, is a challenging and multidimensional issue. Nonetheless, there are efforts that are being championed by the South African Institute of Physics and the physics community of South Africa and Africa as a whole.

This report will highlight efforts aimed at addressing the diversity and inclusion in science challenge. The focus will be on physics as a discipline where the diversity and inclusion challenge is most experienced. Physics, and in particular a diverse programme joining nuclear and particle physics with astrophysics, astronomy, cosmology and theoretical physics, offers a model for driving diversity and inclusion in science.

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